



# HOUSE DEMOCRATIC OFFICE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 28, 2009

CONTACT: Mark Hollis  
(850) 488-9622

## **\*\*IN CASE YOU MISSED IT\*\***

A St. Petersburg Times Editorial

### **“Cold-hearted Republican leadership... JOBLESS LOSE AGAIN”**

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

<http://www.tampabay.com/opinion/editorials/article996308.ece>

**The Times Says: “With Florida’s unemployment rate at a 30-year high, it’s impossible to fathom why state lawmakers may forgo collecting \$444 million in federal unemployment compensation for those out of work. But that is what the Legislature’s cold-hearted Republican leadership is poised to do as the annual session winds to a dismal close.”**

**ST. PETERSBURG TIMES EDITORIAL**  
April 28, 2009

With Florida's unemployment rate at a 30-year high, it's impossible to fathom why state lawmakers may forgo collecting \$444 million in federal unemployment compensation for those out of work. But that is what the Legislature's cold-hearted Republican leadership is poised to do as the annual session winds to a dismal close. Florida, once again, won't get its fair share of federal largesse just when its economy and its residents need it most.

The federal stimulus package greatly expanded opportunities for states to draw down federal money for unemployment funds normally financed through employer taxes. All told, Florida is eligible for more than \$2.6 billion in unemployment assistance, though more than \$1.2 billion requires the state to change qualification guidelines. The Legislature is expected to adapt the rules to collect \$777 million of that money to extend benefits through the end of the year for 250,000 people whose benefits would otherwise expire.

But Republican leaders, lobbied hard by the state's business groups who care more about their bottom lines than their displaced workers, have been unwilling to change state law to collect another \$444 million. The state would have to tweak the formula for calculating an applicant's past income and work experience. And it would have to adopt two of the following three policies: grant additional benefits when a recipient is in an approved job training program; offer slightly higher benefits for larger families; or grant benefits in certain cases when a person quits his or her job out of necessity, such as caring for a sick child, accompanying a spouse on a move, or due to domestic violence.

Those are hardly radical reforms. Gov. Charlie Crist has announced his support for the changes. And just last week, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue, a Republican, signed a law embracing the changes.

But Florida Republican lawmakers are refusing, contending that such an expansion will become an unfunded mandate for the state's employers when the federal money runs out. By their rationale, helping unemployed Floridians in a deep recession will result in more unemployed Floridians when the economy recovers.

But the changes do not have to last forever. House Democrats have obtained a letter from the federal Labor Department that suggests Florida could accept the money now and undo the provisions once the federal money runs out without penalty. Clearly, such a strategy isn't an ideal way to accomplish public policy. But in these fiscal times — where one out of every 10 Floridians is out of work — creative thinking, not partisan rhetoric, should dictate public policy. Every single dollar in unemployment benefits stimulates up to \$2.15 in the economy. And that would help every Floridian — including those businesses trying to thwart the change.

House Republicans demonstrated in their shortsighted rush to support offshore drilling that they can respond quickly to powerful constituencies willing to write big checks for lobbyists and campaign contributions. It would be nice to see the same hustle for thousands of unemployed Floridians who could desperately use that federal money.

###